

The Greatest Gift

When we last left Joseph (Matthew 1:18-25) he was considering the devastating reality that his beloved Mary was pregnant—presumably by another man. How was Joseph to live with this betrayal; how could he cope with the public scandal and shame? Divorce seemed to Joseph to be the only rational solution to the problem of Mary’s unexpected pregnancy.

“And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.” (1:19) It’s clear in the narrative that Joseph believes that Mary has been unfaithful, and yet, he is not willing to bring Mary into a place of public shame and disgrace. He determines to “divorce her quietly” (Deuteronomy 24:1). I want to highlight a principle that we can see based on Joseph’s behavior in this narrative. It’s the principle of *patient consideration*. There’s a very real *appearance* of evil pertaining to Mary’s pregnancy and yet, after patient consideration Joseph makes a determination to show mercy rather than retaliation. The idea of “pondering” or “considering” allows for time to patiently reflect on all the pertinent facts. Like Joseph in this narrative, we too must take time to ponder faithfully all the relevant facts when we’re confronted with problems in our life.

Although we can’t know this absolutely, it’s not unreasonable to imagine that Joseph—a “just man”—has been in deep prayer over this situation. In Proverbs 3:5-6 we’re told that we’re not to lean on our own understanding but to trust in God and he will direct our path. Patience is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). It’s often the case that—based on God’s revealed word—we can know exactly what’s required of us in a given situation. But there are other situations that call for prayer and patient consideration. We want to be careful in making decisions while always finding comfort in obeying the principles of God’s word even if there’s no direct command pertaining to our particular situation.

In my previous article we were introduced to a church in Bethlehem that had been attacked by Muslim extremists but who also desired to call attention to the Advent season and the love of Jesus Christ by giving a Christmas party. When a young Muslim family shows up with tickets in hand for a night of enjoyment, the pastor of this Bethlehem church struggled as he thought, “Can I show the love of Christ to this family tonight?” As he looked at the tickets that this Muslim family was holding he realized that they were for a different event. This was not the party that they were searching for. And yet, rather than turn the family away, the pastor merely said, “Won’t you please come in? Your celebration doesn’t start until later. If you want to spend a little time here first, you could hear something about God’s love and—if you prefer—you could leave then.” Hearing the music and being offered a soft drink they decided to step inside, if only for a moment. God had a plan for this evening that some would not have imagined.

Going back to our text, we’ve looked at *pertinent facts* as well as the fact that Joseph *pondered faithfully*. Let’s look further in the narrative and we’ll see the *promise foretold*. “But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is

from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins'." (1:20-21) What are we to make of this angelic message? First of all, in calling Joseph, "son of David," we see a connection to what Jesus is called in 1:1; "Jesus Christ, the son of David..." Matthew is intentionally establishing Jesus' Davidic lineage. Also, the phrase, "you shall call his name Jesus" is important. The pronoun "you" is singular and refers directly to Joseph who will name the son, "Jesus." For Joseph to formally name the child is to acknowledge Jesus as his legal son with all the privileges that are given through the earthly line of Joseph.

This angel tells Joseph not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. Mary has not sinned. This child to be born of Mary is "conceived in her from the Holy Spirit." There's an amazing miracle revealed here! This child of promise will be called "Jesus" which means "Yahweh is salvation." Mary's son will "save his people from their sin." Jesus is the greatest gift because he is the answer to mankind's deepest need.

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